

Extension Service  
U. S. Dept. Agr.  
Washington 25, D. C.

BUYING MEN'S SUITS<sup>1/</sup>



I. Assumption:

Extension clothing specialists can afford to spend the time for taking leadership in providing help on buying men's suits because:

1. An increasing number of requests are coming to the Extension Service for help on selecting men's clothes, particularly from young men, in relation to style and appearance. Also, what is the difference between a \$50 suit and an \$80 suit?
2. Studies of Family Clothing Supplies by the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics, showed that wool suits, year round and winter, were the highest yearly clothing expenditures for husbands.

Minneapolis	Meeker and 2/
- St. Paul	Wright counties
(Minnesota)	(Minnesota)
1948-1949	1949-1950

For husbands, wool year-round and winter suits -----	\$31.00	\$10.00
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Source: Preliminary Report No. 2, Family Clothing Purchases by Income. Minneapolis-St. Paul, 1948-1949; and FE 693, Family Clothing Practices, Minnesota, Farm and City. BHNHE, U. S. D. A.

II. Objectives:

1. To give men and women in medium income brackets information which will help them buy medium priced (\$ \_\_\_\_ to \$ \_\_\_\_ ) men's suits that are satisfactory to them in style, appearance and service.
2. To build the confidence of young men of the 18-30 year age in selecting suits that are satisfactory in style and appearance.

III. Background: What does the specialist need to know?

Manufacturers and distributors of clothing with a more or less national market may be very much interested in national figures showing income, spending and price trends. The county home demonstration agent and the local retailer are more interested in the income brackets of families living in their county or trading area and the market and employment conditions there. The specialist is in between and has an interest in knowing national and State facts so she can better help the agent evaluate local trends.

1. Distribution of family income. In the United States nearly one-third of the families have incomes of less than \$2,000. Of course, a money income of \$2,000 on a farm would go further than the same

<sup>1/</sup> Prepared by Alice Linn, Extension Clothing Specialist, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington 25, D. C. May 1, 1952.

<sup>2/</sup> Farm-operator families. If the expenditures by Meeker-Wright families were adjusted for the price changes in the year between the studies, the figure would be slightly higher.

income in a city. Who are those families with less than \$2,000 in a given community? Are they families with young children or are they retired couples? To which families is clothing important socially? To which ones would buying clothing be a money problem? Is there a difference in the desires of a low income family living in a community where the whole community has about the same income and those where the community ranges from high to low?

More than a third of the families in the United States are in the \$2,000 to \$4,000 income group. Are they the "good customers" in a small town community? Are they the ones that influence the kind of suits a merchant stocks? What is the difference in the way they spend for clothes and the way a family of the same income living in an urbanized area spends for clothes?

Less than a third of the families living in the United States have incomes of more than \$4,000. They have the most dollar votes in the clothing market. What is the difference in the way a man from this income group buys a suit and the way a man from the income group of less than \$2,000 buys a suit?

Percent Distribution of Families by 1949 Income

Income	United States	North East	North Central	South	West
Under \$1,000 -----	15	11	12	24	11
\$1,000 - 1,999 -----	16	11	13	21	13
\$2,000 - 2,999 -----	18	19	19	18	17
\$3,000 - 3,999 -----	20	22	22	15	22
\$4,000 - 4,999 -----	12	14	13	9	14
\$5,000 - 5,999 -----	8	9	9	5	9
\$6,000 and over -----	12	14	12	8	14

Source: Bureau of the Census (U. S. Dept. of Commerce, Washington 25, D. C. (1950 Census of Population, Preliminary Report, Series PC-7, No. 2)

## 2. Trends in incomes and spending.

As a group, consumers spend more for clothing as they have more to spend. Clothing expenditures are always a big item in personal expenditures. Disposable income more than doubled from 1941 to 1950, as did expenditures for clothing. Prices went up nearly two-thirds.

In considering the income figures it is well to remember that population increased from 131,169,000 in 1940 to 150,697,000 in 1950, and that the two age groups where the greatest change occurred were the under 5 and over 75. While not all families benefit equally from rising incomes, a general knowledge of trends in incomes and prices can help an agent in evaluating comments about prices which often come up in meetings. National figures would probably be more comparable to urbanized areas than to rural counties. Do the county analyses bear out that statement?

Clothing prices increased more from 1941 to 1950 than the prices of all consumer goods. Men's wool suits went up even more. In fact, they nearly doubled.

Personal income and expenditures

	1950	1949	1941	1935
Disposable personal income(billions of dollars)	204.3	186.4	92.0	58.0
Personal consumption expenditures " " "	193.6	180.2	82.3	56.2
Clothing, accessories, and jewelry " " "	22.9	22.9	10.5	7.0
Clothing, accessories, and jewelry (percentage of disposable income) -----	11%	12%	11%	12%
Clothing accessories, and jewelry (percentage of consumption expenditures) -----	12%	13%	13%	12%

Source: A supplement to the Survey of Current Business, National Income, 1951 edition.

Consumers' price index 1935-39=100) for moderate-income families in large cities

Items	1950	1949	1941	1935
All items -----	171.9	171.9	105.2	98.1
Food -----	204.5	210.2	105.5	100.4
Apparel -----	187.7	198.0	106.3	96.8
Rent -----	131.0	121.2	106.4	94.2
Fuel, electricity, refrigeration ---	140.6	133.9	102.2	100.7
House furnishings -----	190.2	195.8	107.3	94.8
Miscellaneous -----	156.5	149.9	104.0	98.1

Source: Monthly Labor Review.

Index of Retail Prices of Selected Articles Purchased by Moderate Income Families in Large Cities of the United States (1935-39=100)

	1950	1949	1941	1935
Men's year-round weight suits(wool) 204.2	205.9	108.3	94.5	

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, U. S. Department of Labor.

3. Expenditures for wool suits, year round and winter.

What clues can we get from the Studies of Family Clothing Supplies? Nearly half of the men bought a wool suit during the year and the average price paid was nearly \$65. As the income went up more suits were bought. Average yearly expenditures tripled from the \$2,000 to \$3,000 income to the \$4,000 to \$6,000 income class. Expenditures for men's year round and winter suits were 19 percent of the husband's total ready-to-wear expenditures for the \$2,000 to \$3,000 income class; they were 26 percent for the \$4,000 to \$6,000 income class. Check with the prices which the trade reported as best sellers in the county analyses.

Expenditures for Men's Wool Suits, Year Round and Winter	Family Income			
	All	\$2000-	\$3000-	\$4000-
Husbands	2999	3999	5999	
Average yearly expenditure -----	\$31.18	17.26	25.87	50.47
Average number purchases -----	.49	.31	.47	.77
Percent purchasing -----	40%	30%	44%	54%
Average unit price -----	63.35	55.74	54.65	65.91

Relation of Amount Spent for Suits  
To Total Clothing Expenditures

Families' average expenditures -----	\$354	259	320	506
Husbands' average expenditures -----	129	91	114	193
Husbands' average expenditures for wool suits -----	31	17	26	50

Source: Preliminary Report No. 2. Family Clothing Purchases by  
Income. Minneapolis-St. Paul, 1948-1949. BHNHE, U. S. D. A.

4. In what price ranges of men's suits are the best sellers found?  
What fabrics are most often found in these best sellers?  
What styles?  
What kind of tailoring?  
What are some common characteristics of the lowest price ranges?
5. Are there differences in marketing men's suits according to region,  
types of stores, type of community, etc.?
6. What makes the difference in prices of men's suits? What is the  
relation between quality and price? Are two pairs of pants a good  
investment?
7. Do labels help in judging quality? What are the manufacturers'  
and retailers' problems in labeling men's suits?
8. How can the customer judge quality in a man's suit?
9. How can the customer judge the fit of a man's suit?
10. What styles look best on the different figure types of men? What  
styles are suitable for different occasions?
11. What fabrics should be chosen for different occasions as to ap-  
pearance, wear and care?
12. What are the general style trends in men's suits?
13. To what extent do women come to the store to help men select suits?
14. Are there any particular seasons when men tend to buy suits?  
• (According to Men's Wear, 1951 Fact Book, prepared for Men's Wear  
Magazine, the heaviest sales in all men's wear in 1950 were made  
in November and December).